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Islam in Europe: All the Rage

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There is a growing concern in Western Europe that Islamic militants are targeting specific individuals to be killed, according to Stratfor, quoting sources close to the European intelligence community. The slaying of Theo van Gogh, they say, “could mark the beginning of a wave of attacks against Jews and critics of Islam. ... In other words, a wide-reaching security problem could be brewing in Western Europe” (Nov. 19, 2004).

The crackdown on Islamist militants in the Netherlands following Van Gogh’s death uncovered a plot to assassinate several Dutch and European politicians, including European Commission President Jose Manuel Durao Barroso, the mayor of Amsterdam, and Dutch members of parliament who had been critical of Islam.

Dutch politician Geert Wilders, who has for some time been calling for radical mosques in Amsterdam to be closed because of terrorist connections, is in semi-hiding after being warned he could be the next victim after Van Gogh. In Belgium, Senator Mimount Bousakla, whose own parents are Muslim, is under police protection after being threatened with death by a Muslim fanatic. Her “crime”? She criticized Belgium’s Muslim Executive for not condemning the Van Gogh murder. Dutch MP Ayaan Hirsi Ali, an ex-Muslim from Somalia, similarly had to go underground because she had helped Van Gogh produce his film critical of Islam’s treatment of women.

Stratfor speculates that small independent jihadists in Europe such as the Dutch group behind Van Gogh’s murder “could begin to consolidate and grow to the level of much larger and more dangerous entities” (Nov. 11, 2004). The danger is compounded by the groundswell of potential support from the Muslim community. In the Netherlands, for example, opinion polls indicate that as many as 50,000 young Muslim men “hold radical Islamist views, supporting suicide bombers and al Qaeda” (*Daily Mail*, London, Nov. 6, 2004).

The *Mail* stated that “Already a backlash is apparent, with grumbles turning to outright hostility and violence” (ibid.). This plays precisely into the radicals’ aims. “[T]his will lead to radicals being able to secure the solidarity of the Muslim masses,” said Gilles Kepel, author of *The War for Muslim Minds*.

Culture clashes between Muslim immigrants and the local populace are already a problem in Europe, and many sources acknowledge the potential for widespread tit-for-tat violence across the Continent. “Firebombing of mosques, attacks against Muslim religious leaders and the rise of far-right, anti-immigration parties already are occurring The potential for those activities to grow into a prolonged campaign of violence and repression—and the inevitable Muslim backlash against such a campaign—is certainly in place, and could well lead to a Europe-wide struggle between two cultures” (Stratfor, Dec. 2, 2004). ■

